

Survival



Shri Ravi Singh
WWF-India
172 B, Lodhi Estate
New Delhi-110003

17 December 2014

Dear Mr Singh,

Re: Illegal evictions of tribal people from Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh and its associated wildlife corridors.

Survival International, the global movement for tribal peoples' rights, has received disturbing reports of the forced eviction of Baiga and Gond tribal families from the core area of Kanha Tiger Reserve during June 2014, and of the threatened eviction of over one hundred villages from the Kanha-Achanakmar corridor.

According to your website, WWF-India has been supporting the Forest Departments in this region since 1999, including the provision of training, patrol resources and vehicles for the foresters who are conducting these evictions, and is working in 29 of the villages in the Kanha-Achanakmar corridor.

Baiga and Gond Adivasis in Kanha's core zone have told us of their strong resistance to being removed from their homes and land. They report that they are being harassed and threatened by the Forest Department. Some say they were threatened that, if they did not leave, their homes would be trampled by Forest Department elephants. Local communities have a strong memory of trained elephants being used in evictions in recent decades, so this threat was deeply frightening to them.

Contrary to the Ministry of Environment and Forests' Protocol for Voluntary Relocation, villagers have told us there has, to date, been no "handholding" (support through the process of resettlement) for the families of Jholar and other villagers from the core zone evicted this year. Although they have received some monetary compensation, the impact of these evictions has been the fragmentation of these communities because families have had to try to settle wherever they can in surrounding villages. As one displaced person from Jholar told us, *"We got some money, but we are lost – wandering in search of land. Here there is only sadness. We need the jungle."*

The evictions from Khana were not "voluntary relocation". The Forest Department's actions violate the international law on tribal peoples' rights, which guarantees their right

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**We are the global movement
for tribal peoples' rights. We help
them defend their lives, protect
their lands and determine their
own futures.**

to a livelihood on their ancestral lands and to give or withhold their consent to relocation and to projects affecting their lands.

The evictions are also illegal under both the Wildlife (Protection) Act Amendment (2006) and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA) because the gram sabhas (village councils) of these villages did not give their free, prior, informed consent and people left under duress. A vital prerequisite to relocation under both acts is that villagers' forest rights should be recognised, but this process had hardly begun in these villages, and many people did not even know about the FRA.

WWF has publicly stated that, "WWF opposes forced relocations - WWF-India played no role in previous forced relocations in Kanha (or anywhere else in India). WWF-India has helped communities that have given their consent to voluntary relocation ensure that due process is followed and they are not deprived of their rights or cheated by outsiders."

Please can you inform us:

1. What steps WWF-India has taken to oppose forced relocations (such as those that occurred in June 2014) and what criteria they use to ensure that those communities they are helping have given their genuinely free, prior and informed consent to their voluntary relocation?
2. What steps you have taken to ensure that WWF-India is not complicit in this gross abuse of the rights of the families evicted from Kanha and those threatened with eviction in the corridor?
3. How you are ensuring that your activities in this area are consistent with WWF's commitments to respect indigenous peoples' rights as set out in "Indigenous Peoples and Conservation: WWF statement of principles" and with ILO Convention 169 and UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?
4. Whether the 29 villages with which you work in the corridor area are due to be relocated and, if so, what steps WWF will take to ensure that residents only leave if and when they have freely given their informed consent to do so.

We look forward to your prompt response to these questions and, in the meantime, urge you to speak out against these evictions.

Yours sincerely


Stephen Corry
Director

Cc Marco Lambertini, Director General, WWF International.